

CLINTON HILL NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL  
26 Shanley Avenue  
Newark 8 New Jersey

THE EDUCATIONAL SITUATION IN CLINTON HILL

Statement approved December 8, 1960, by Council Assembly.

PREAMBLE

The following statement and request for action on the educational situation in the Clinton Hill section was drafted by the Education Committee of the Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council and approved by the Executive Committee at its December 5 meeting. The statement is submitted to the Council Assembly for approval as policy and shall be presented to other groups sharing our concern.

No community in Newark has a greater need for a major improvement in its educational facilities than the Clinton Hill section. Faced with a 25 per cent increase in population between 1950 and 1960, an unusually large per cent are children due to the fact that the rise has been among younger couples with young children, and to outmoded plant facilities. Clinton Hill schools have suffered severe pressure as a result of an inadequate number of classrooms to meet the increased enrollment and a shortage of teachers. All three elementary schools (Bergen, Avon, Madison) are on split sessions.

1. Avon and Bergen Street schools rank among the top five in the city in enrollment increases since September 1959. In fact Bergen has shown the highest enrollment increase in the city.

2. As a consequence, Bergen has 14 split session classes, Avon has 16, and Madison, the last in the community to go on split sessions, already has 14 split sessions in the past year alone.

3. Since Avon Ave. school's auditorium was converted to classrooms a year ago, this school has had no auditorium. Also, Bergen and Avon have no lunchrooms. Children are forced to eat lunch in crowded grocery stores or luncheonettes or worse, on the street. This shocking situation is caused by the fact that a large proportion of Clinton Hill mothers work full time and are therefore unable to provide home cooked meals. They must depend on the school for a hot lunch or for space for their children to eat. Neither school provides such facilities.

4. In the split session classes enrollment often exceeds 35 pupils, making it virtually impossible for a child to receive a decent education. Moreover, in some classes, two grades sit together in one classroom with only one teacher on a part time schedule. Demands on the time of the teacher are prohibitive in such an atmosphere. The teacher is converted into a policeman. Attention to individual needs and problems of the child cannot be given because the teacher has barely enough time to complete the minimum curriculum requirements.

5. All schools have a high proportion of substitute teachers, making it difficult for the school to maintain pedagogical standards.

The Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council called this situation to the attention of the Board of Education on many occasions, beginning nearly three years ago.

The Council has sought a new school for the area and emergency relief for the present overcrowded situation. In 15 appearances before the Board of Education, our speakers have documented the overcrowding. Not once has any member of the Board challenged the facts we presented. Neither has the superintendent questioned their validity. 3,000 petitions asking for relief were presented.

To the demand that suitable temporary facilities be found in the community to provide additional classrooms, the superintendent has made no reply. Instead a plan was offered to provide buses to transport children out of the area to far distant schools every day in order to get a fair educational opportunity. Parents overwhelmingly rejected this bus proposal because they could not see it as a solution to their problem. It provided for no added facilities. It involved the youngest children from grades 1 to 4. It was presented in an unpalatable manner which painted the consequences if the child missed a bus. It was a makeshift solution to an organic problem, and hence was no solution at all.

The superintendent last October 1960 recommended that certain building be done in Clinton Hill: a new school be constructed to relieve Bergen St.; six additional classrooms at Madison; additions (lunchroom, auditorium) at Bergen and Aven. This recommendation, made two months ago, has not been followed with any specific plans as to timetable or site. It remains a promise only. This recommendation came in October, twelve months after the Board had asked the superintendent to investigate the situation. They had asked for a January 1960 reply.

We have been told that the Board of Education does not initiate action, that it acts on the basis of recommendations made by the superintendent and his staff. We are told that the Mayor regards the Board as autonomous even though he appoints its members. He is unwilling to apply executive pressure in behalf of the people, he says, on the grounds that it is improper to mix politics with our children's education.

We have concluded that the superintendent bears full responsibility for the failure of the Board to take action in face of a clear cut crisis in our neighborhood's educational system. This crisis has been with us in its most blatant form for three years. We feel that time enough has been given the superintendent to allow him to come up with a concrete plan to alleviate the overcrowding by providing more classrooms.

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We have seen some of the most / -minded residents of Clinton Hill leave because they felt that their children's education was so vital, that they would not tolerate the kind of education which our schools were offering.

We find that the rapid deterioration of the educational standards of the community has occurred coincidentally with the change of our neighborhood from a predominantly white area to an integrated one. Because it has become the proclaimed policy of our council to preserve the integrated character of Clinton Hill, we have concluded that the school situation, as it is, is a positive impediment toward achieving that aim.

Moreover, we fail to see how the city can remain indifferent to our plight in education in view of the \$750,000 Urban Rehabilitation project now going on in

the middle of our area, a section serviced by two of the most affected schools in the entire city. Poor schools detract from the fundamental principle of the program; namely, to preserve decent neighborhood standards.

We regard the solution to the school crisis as integral to the task of neighborhood conservation and rehabilitation. Inferior schools make for transient and unstable communities. The rising aspirations of the people of our community for their children will not permit them to stand idly while their children are deprived of their right to an adequate education. The inadequate cultural and intellectual school standards intensify the process of decline. But Mr. Kennally is already aware of these arguments because he has heard them at least a dozen times. Why no action?

We cannot help but feel that our community suffers from gross neglect. Several years ago, when we first presented our proposals for a new school and other solutions, we were assured by Dr. Kennally and his subordinates that the long-run perspective indicated a decrease in the area's population; therefore a new school was not needed. Since the time these "prophetic words" were uttered, Clinton Hill's population has dramatically leaped. It is one of the few sections of the city not to suffer a decline in numbers at the last census.

When split sessions were introduced into Bergen and Avon, we asked why there had been no planning to meet the overcrowding. The superintendent replied that the population growth was unforeseen. That was three years ago. Now we are told it is only temporary. Time has brought home the falsity of the superintendent's working theories. Yet we still have been offered no real solution for improvement.

The past three years has seen action by the superintendent to meet educational needs in other Newark communities. Plans are under way for a new Vailsburg High School, for a new Barringer, for improvements to South 8th Street school. New schools are being built or planned in areas contiguous to new housing projects. We are happy over these actions and do not wish to detract from their justice. All we ask is for equal treatment, for the same consideration.

We have been patient. We have gone through laborious channels. Thus far we are not getting satisfaction to our most basic and minimal needs.

We feel that the record justifies our doubts about Dr. Kennally's genuine concern for our neighborhood's schools. A superintendent of schools has the responsibility to serve the needs of all sections of the city, not just a few.

The superintendent's power to make decisions and recommendations which may determine the fate of entire communities makes his actions subject to the careful scrutiny of the Board of Education. We feel compelled to call into question his competency in his job because he has failed to fulfill his public trust to serve the entire city equally.

We therefore ask the Board of Education to inquire into Dr. Edward F.

Kennally's administration with a view to ascertaining his competency to continue as superintendent of schools.